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Frustrated but happy editor in the far western Pacific

By Wayne A. Butterbaugh

GUAM

He looked out the window of the jet 707 into the dark blue Pacific far below. Then he turned to face his fellow passenger, Ed Flores, son of the publisher of the *Guam Daily News*.

"What is Guam really like?" he asked rather naively.

"You'll like the island," Flores said, "but you may find it rather frustrating."

That was in December, 1965, and these words have long since turned out to be the understatement of the year.

Joe Murphy had just left San Francisco where for several years he had edited suburban weekly newspapers in the San Jose area.

Murphy said he felt an ulcer coming on in the pell mell existence in the highly competitive Bay Area and, feeling the need for adventure in his soul, he answered an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for a managing editor's position on Guam.

Armed with a University of Wisconsin degree in journalism and a solid newspaper background in Wisconsin, Oregon and California, he was hired.

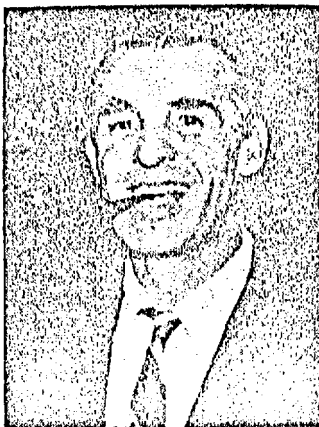
Now, three years later and no longer naive, Murphy says that the first person who asks where the U.S. Territory of Guam is on report.

"It's a pleasant tropical island 34 miles long, four to eight miles wide, and is located in the far Western Pacific. Guam is roughly 1500 miles from nowhere!" according to Murphy.

Other interests

The *Daily News* is the largest (and at this writing the only) newspaper on the island and it has a daily paid circulation of about 9,000.

Established by the U.S. Navy following the retaking of Guam from the Japanese in July, 1944, the *Daily News* was purchased by Joseph Flores in 1952. Flores, a Guamanian who published community newspapers in San Francisco before returning to Guam, has been its editor and publisher ever since.



Joe Murphy

Besides owning the newspaper, Flores heads a savings and loan company, a finance company, has recently built a hotel-apartment complex, and was the appointed governor of Guam under the Eisenhower administration.

Guam, which is the largest volcanic island in the Marianas chain, has a population of nearly 100,000. Broken down, about half the population is composed of the military and their dependents, Filipino contract workers, and Federal Civil Service workers. About 40,000 are considered "locals," or Guamanians who speak both English and Chamorro. The remainder are transplanted business and professional people, school teachers and other Statesiders working for the Government of Guam.

Modern plant

But what usually comes as a surprise to many visiting firemen to Guam is that the *Daily News* plant is quite modern considering the distance from the U.S. Mainland and Hawaii.

The backbone of the newspaper, besides Joe Murphy, is a three-unit Goss Suburban offset press and four sets of Friden Justowriters. Equipment also includes headliners, cameras, linecasters and a wide variety of old but productive letterpress equipment.

Nevertheless, as Murphy says and this writer agrees, "What a place to run a newspaper,

Frustrations you wouldn't believe!"

Murphy said part of the problem is the isolation of the island. "We're actually closer to Moscow than to Washington, D. C."

"Another problem is the scarcity of trained help to run a newspaper. And far from least is the climatic problem where typewriters rust while you type alone, and where the moist tropical air hangs around the machinery as well as the people running it."

"But take the personnel problem," Murphy said.

"In the three years I've been out here we've sent back to the Mainland and Hawaii for no less than five reporters, none of whom lasted much more than a year and none of whom are still with us."

Murphy said he has had Peace Corps drop-outs, Navy dependents, Air Force and Navy men moonlighting, various and sundry local people, wives and college kids—a total of more than 30 staff writers in a three-year period!

Soon after Murphy "invaded" Guam he had, besides himself as managing editor, a five-man editorial staff.

The hot, non-airconditioned editorial room (the Pacific Press building is one of the few on Guam not airconditioned) boasted an associate editor who also served as editor of the paper's Sunday *Territorial Sun* (that was this writer); a great local gal who handled the women's pages and some features; a Mainland reporter who turned into a beachcomber; a woman military dependent with a journalism degree; and a competent sports editor.

Currently Murphy is down to himself and one girl reporter.

192 pages a week

Between the two of them they put out a 24-page tabloid every day except Friday, when the paper usually jumps to 40 pages, and Saturday when a balance of editorial and advertising content necessitates 32 pages—an

average of 192 pages a week including advertising. (Roughly a 50-50 average.)

In the morning his sole colleague edits some of the AP wire copy and makes up her women's pages. The witty managing editor dummies up a few pages; writes the heads; answers the continually ringing phones (currently there are more phones than staff and they carry their share of crank calls); scales photos; and assigns his reporter P.M. stories.

Then, while his reporter is covering her beats in the afternoon, Murphy puts together the sports pages; writes his daily column, "Pipe Dreams," which is the first read piece in the *Daily News* and writes a local editorial.

With these daily chores finally cleared from his much cluttered desk, and with a sudden burst of new-found energy, Murphy assists his five production girls in pasting up the flats.

Finally, by seven or eight o'clock in the evening (an average 10-hour work day), the *Daily News* is put to bed because the wire is down and not too much happens on Guam at night. (Except when the Guam Legislature is in session and then he is lucky to leave the office before midnight.)

Now is the time for the camera process man, who also doubles as staff photographer, to shoot the pages and make the plates. By midnight it is hoped that the pressmen are standing by and if all goes well, the presses are rolling by 2 A.M.

But, as every newspaperman knows, the routine is not over yet—there is still circulation and the *Daily News* has more than its share of circulation problems. Unlike most areas, there is an acute shortage of dependable carrier boys. This, together with the fact that many subscribers live in remote villages, compounds the problem.

However, hopefully by eight in the morning (frequent downpours can mean no paper) every subscriber on Guam—from Yigo on the north to Merizo on the south—have their newspapers with their morning cups of coffee. And this is just about the time Murphy heads back to his office to begin over again. Seven days a week!

This is restful? This will prevent an ulcer?

The language is perhaps one of the biggest bugaboos on Guam. Right now Murphy is the only Statesider on the news—working in editorial production, the business office, advertising, circulation and the back shop.

And while most of the Guamanians speak excellent English, they for the most part insist upon conversing among themselves in the vernacular.

As can be imagined, five or six typesetters chattering away in Chamorro and setting type in English does create some interesting typos.

Classic goofs

After the type is set it goes to a Filipina proofreader who also has a small language problem. She marks and sends the proofs to a Palauan girl for corrections. As Murphy says, "It's practically an international incident just to get the paper out."

"Not knowing my problems," Murphy said, "many of the newly arrived military become quite critical of the numerous typos."

"And we do get some classic goofs—like the time we ran a photo on page one of a group of Japanese dignitaries visiting our governor, Manuel F. L. Guerrero."

"The caption, as I originally wrote it, said that members of the Japanese Diet were paying a courtesy call on the governor. Would you believe that under the picture the next morning it blithely said that the Japanese were paying a 'controversy' call on the governor?" (Considering the occupation this might have been closer to the truth. Japan now has Iwo Jima and soon expects the return of Okinawa.)

Murphy claims that the absence of competent help can sometimes cause some humorous situations, although he was not really laughing when he said it.

"For instance," he said, "I can remember the time when I did have a sports editor—way back a year ago. Two of the phones in the news room are listed under 'Sports Editor' and 'Managing Editor.'"

"Anyway, a few weeks ago I was back at the sports' desk making up a couple of sports pages when the phone rang and some clown in the military asked to speak to the sports editor."

"I'm your man," Murphy truthfully said.

"Who won the heavyweight fight in New York? the caller asked."

Complaint department

With this Murphy tried to explain that because Guam is a day ahead of the Mainland (its over the International Date Line) the fight had not been fought yet. But he failed to get through to the caller who apparently presumed Murphy was trying to hold him off or at least very few, in the

Finally, after taking considerable abuse from the belligerent caller, the sports editor-managing editor slammed the phone down with reckless abandon and went back to his sports pages.

But a few minutes later the phone on the other side of the news room rang and Murphy trudged over to answer it.

A familiar voice came on the line: "I would like to speak to the managing editor."

"This is the managing editor," Murphy again truthfully replied.

"Joe Murphy?"

"Yes, this is he."

"Well," the voice said, "I'd like to report your sports editor—he was rude to me on the phone!"

"I'm sorry," Murphy said, "he probably had a bad night . . . I'll have a talk with him." With this the managing editor-sports editor slowly put the phone back on its hook—softly this time.

There are other frustrations, too, according to Murphy. Like the time the platemaker, who apparently does not savvy English very well, reversed one of the negatives, made a plate, and the pressman strapped it on the press and ran the entire edition off with a completely mirror image page.

That morning Daily News readers held their papers up to their bathroom mirrors to learn the latest news. (From this episode can be pictured just how often the pressmen check the runs for proper ink flow. Barring a major mechanical or electrical failure, once the press begins to roll it continues running until the run is completed.)

Supply, too, can be a big headache. One example Murphy cites is the time an opposition P.M. daily (the *Pacific Journal*), which is no longer in operation, ran out of newsprint. Consequently several rolls had to be flown in from Manila some 1500 miles away at a tremendous cost for air freight.

"On Guam you can't run out of carbon paper, ribbons, tapes, plates, or any other materials it takes to run a newspaper—if you do you're a dead duck! And if your press breaks down—heaven forbid—you are among the missing until you fly a machinist in to set things right," Murphy said.

Tops in readership

But despite these many working hardships, Murphy is quick to point out that there are advantages to applying your skills on a far-flung island.

"Take readership," said the

Mainland has readership like I have in my daily life. . . that it's that good, but there's little else for our subscribers to read.

"Aside from *Stars & Stripes*, very few timely newspapers come into Guam and for this reason what I write people read. From a columnist's point of view you might say that I'm a big frog in a little pond."

Literally Guam is where America's day begins. It is also an island crossroads where practically everybody of importance, and plenty who are not so important, seem to pass through at one time or another.

During the past three years Murphy has talked with the likes of Danny Kaye, Bob Hope, Jimmie Stewart, Lee Marvin

and almost as many starlets as there are stars in the sky.

He has met or interviewed almost 20 percent of the nation's senators and has lost count of the number of U.S. representatives who have passed through Guam on official business.

Other personages who have made local headlines include the Secretaries of State, Defense, Army, Navy and Interior. Also dozens of statesmen.

The versatile 44-year-old editor has dined with as many as three admirals at one sitting—which is not bad for a guy who worked his way down to seaman first class during World War II.

And for real gutsy excitement on Guam, the chain pipe-smoking Murphy has managed to dive in an atomic submarine, fly missions with the Air Force, and fly with the Typhoon Trackers into the eye of a typhoon. Even President Johnson visited Guam since his arrival.

"In the good old days, when I had an editorial staff, I even found time to visit the surrounding islands of the Trust Territory of the Pacific—Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Pagan, Peleliu, Angar, Babelthrup, Yap and Koror. And on one of my favorite atolls Ulithi, the girls are topless!—just like they were before I left San Francisco," said Murphy.

Finally, while we were attending the weekly Guam Press Club luncheon meeting, Joe Murphy summed up his feelings:

"Despite all the frustrations," he said, "and despite all the work, I think Guam is one of the most exciting and fascinating places in the world to put out a newspaper."

"It's a rewarding job and I've no desire to return to that big PX we call the Mainland. Mainly, I guess, because I want to see what the hell is going to happen."